

Love and Safety by nerdsarehot75

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Summary:

Joyce finds out that Hopper leaves food for Eleven

Love and Safety

Joyce hadn't meant to find out. She'd been driving home after a double shift at the store and had seen Hopper's truck parked on the side of the road. She'd pulled over to see if something was wrong only to find the cab empty. She'd waited a few minutes to see if he'd return.

He'd walked out of the woods, leaves snagged on his coat. He'd stopped when he saw her, his eyebrows knitting together. She took a hesitant step towards him. He snapped out of whatever it was and strode towards her.

"Is something wrong? Has something happened?" His words were hard and fast and she took a step back, momentarily stunned.

"No. I saw your truck, I thought you might need help or something," she replied. He bent down to her level, looking her eyes for a minute. He nodded and straightened up again.

"What are you doing out here, Hop?" she asked.

"Nothing," he replied.

"Yeah, I'm sure that's why you parked and walked off into the woods. That's obviously nothing," she snapped, crossing her arms.

"Why are you getting so mad?" he deflected.

"I was worried. I saw the truck and it was empty and you weren't in sight. I thought something bad had happened," she said.

"Joyce, everything's fine. Nothing's wrong," he said, rubbing her arms until she uncrossed them.

"Then what are you doing?" she asked her voice small.

"Not here," he replied, looking around. "Get in your car and follow me."

She followed him for about fifteen minutes. They had well and truly driven out of town, no houses in sight. They stopped at the side of the road, the slamming of doors the only sound in the night. Hopper took Joyce's arm and led her off the road. They walked for a few minutes until she could barely see the outlines of the vehicles in the darkness.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on or not?" she asked, planting her feet so he couldn't drag her further into the dark.

"Fine. You remember how the kids said Eleven disappeared with the monster?" he asked. She nodded, a lump forming in her throat.

"They get me to leave food for her. Sometimes it's taken, sometimes

it's not. They think it's her," he said. Joyce's eyes widened.

"What do you mean it's her? And who are they?" she asked.

"I can't tell you that. Technically I shouldn't have told you about Eleven. If I tell you anymore you or the boys may be in danger," he said, silencing her with a finger on her lips. She glared at him. He snatched it back, not wanting to enrage her further.

"If she's really out there shouldn't you be doing more than just giving her food? Like bringing her home?" she barked.

"We don't know where she is. We can't even be sure it's her taking the food. Until we know more there isn't much we can do," he said.

"We could try to contact her, talk to her," Joyce said. "She's probably terrified."

"Joyce, we can only do so much. I know. I know. I want to do more but we can't. Not yet at least." She could see the guilt in his face and her heart clenched. A young girl was out there in danger and they were standing there acting like it wasn't something terrible, like it was normal. And it hurt both of them.

"Okay, what can I do to help?" she asked.

"Nothing. If they know you know anything they'll come for you. They could hurt you or your kids," he rushed out. His hands grasped her shoulders, shaking her and she took a step back out of his reach.

"Sorry." He dragged a hand over his face.

"Then why are you telling me?" she asked.

"You asked," he replied. His voice was strained. She stood down, softening and gently rubbing his arm.

"Okay." She took his hand in her's. "We should be getting home. It's late."

He followed her back to the car, happy to be the one being dragged this time. He followed her back into their town limits, flashing his lights before taking the turn back to his trailer. She let out a long breath and hurried home, happy to find her boys there together, safe, untroubled.

A week later Hopper came back into the station from his lunch break, ready to shut himself in his office and ignore the usual annoyances of Callahan. He shut the door and turned to his desk, a plastic bag sitting on it. He looked inside, a couple of boxes of Eggos resting there. Nothing else.

He popped his head out of his office, looking for who may have left it there. No one was in the hall. He closed the door again and looked at

it, unsure if this was a new message from Them.

A knocking at the door startled him. Flo was standing outside, a sticky note in her hand.

"There's been a call to other side of town. Something about stolen gnomes," she said, reading of the note before handing it to him.

"That's great. Hey, who left that on my desk?" he asked, motioning behind him.

"Joyce Byers. She came in and said to tell you there were eleven or something like that. She looked like she was in a rush," she replied.

"Eleven? You're sure she said Eleven?" he asked, his eyes darting between her and the hall.

"Yeah, eleven. Is something the matter?" she said.

"No, no, thanks Flo." He shut the door, ignoring the paper in his hand.

He looked back through the plastic bag. Definitely just Eggos. He shook his head. He left the room abruptly, leaving Callahan to sort out the gnome problem and walked over to the general store. Joyce wasn't at a cash register and when he walked along the aisles he couldn't find her there either.

He wasn't willing to ask someone, he didn't need to feed the rumour mill any further. He wandered around for a few minutes, looking around the store. When it became apparent she wasn't around he left, ignoring the whispers he left behind.

Hopper pulled up at the Byers' house, shutting off the lights. He'd left the food for Eleven and had sat in the Bronco thinking over if he should do this. She probably didn't want him to. If Joyce had wanted his thanks she would have hung around until he'd come back from lunch.

But he was there and it would be odd if he left now, without at least knocking to see if she answered. He left the truck and walked up to the door and raised his hand to knock.

Joyce opened the door, jerking back when she saw his fist. He lowered it. She stepped out onto the porch, closing the door behind her and leading him back to the Bronco. He slid inside after her, glancing back at the house. The living room light was on.

"What are we doing out here?" he asked, turning back to her.

"If you're here for the reason I think then I'd rather Will and Jonathan didn't hear us," she explained, twisting her hands together. "Although if it's not that we can go back inside."

"No, it is." He smiled at her.

"Oh, good." Silence.

They sat, staring at each other in the faded light. The stars were beginning to come out and the moon was shining in at them. The silver light made everything seem fuzzy at the edge, as if none of it was real.

"I wanted to say thanks for the food," Hopper whispered.

"Of course," she said.

"It's greatly appreciated," he said.

She gently took his hand. He looked down at it, wondering how something so simple could make his heart leap so much. She was smiling at him when he looked back up and he cupped her face. She nuzzled his palm.

"You're a good man, Jim Hopper," she said.

"Nah, just trying not to be an asshole this time," he replied, ignoring the heat he could feel in his face.

"Same thing." She quickly pressed her lips to his, drawing back too fast for him to react properly. "You should probably be getting home. Don't want to raise the alarm."

He nodded and she slipped from his hold, climbing out of the truck. She stood in front of it, her hand raised in a wave. He smiled at her and drove off into the night. She smiled. He really was a good man. Finding out about what he did for that girl, the girl who had helped them so much despite her fear, made her heart feel as if it were overflowing with love. That he cared so much, that he was trying his hardest, that he wasn't too broken to still look after other girls, it was too much for her. She wanted to hold him and never let him go. He probably didn't know. She just hoped there was enough space left in his heart to let her in.

She turned and walked back into her house, the light embracing her. She didn't notice the eyes watching her from the darkness nor the whispered sentence following her. If she had, maybe Eleven's continued existence wouldn't still be in question. But for now, this was what they had. And it would have to do.